

CHAPTER 8.0 Ladd Field National Historic Landmark

It has been nearly 60 years since World War II ended, and more than 40 years since the Army took over the post. Although Fort Wainwright has undergone transformations over the years, the anchor of the installation remains the airfield in the bend of the Chena River. This airfield, the permanent garrison around the North Post, scattered groups of Butler buildings, chapel, MARS building, Nurses quarters, and Birchwood hangars still exist, providing Fort Wainwright with a tangible link to its origins. Today, these resources are part of the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark.

The National Register and National Historic Landmarks

The National Register of Historic Places is an official list of significant state, local, and national historic properties. Established under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (NHPA), the register has been called “the nation’s inventory of historic places” and “a national census of historic properties.”¹⁴⁶ Presently, more than 76,000 properties are listed on the National Register. To be eligible for listing on the National Register, properties must be linked with a significant historic context, meet at least one of the National Register’s standard criteria, and possess “integrity”—the essential physical features which represent or illustrate the historic significance. According to the provisions of NHPA, federal agencies must take into account the effects of their undertakings on properties which are eligible for listing on the National Register.

A National Historic Landmark is a historic property or district that has been recognized for possessing “exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States.”¹⁴⁷ The first National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) were created as a result of the Historic Sites Act of 1935, and their importance was reaffirmed in the 1966 National Historic Preservation Act. Fewer than 2,500 of these landmarks presently exist across the United States. They include some Revolutionary War, Civil War, and WWII battlefields; commercial, industrial, and cultural buildings such as the Empire State Building

¹⁴⁶ U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Cultural Resources, *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*, National Register Bulletin, 1.

¹⁴⁷ <http://www.cr.nps.gov/nhl/QA.htm>. Properties meet the threshold for recognition as National Historic Landmarks by demonstrating national significance in accordance with these definitions and criteria. “The quality of national significance is ascribed to districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States in history, architecture, archeology, technology and culture; and that possess a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association, and: (1) That is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to, and are identified with, or that outstandingly represents, the broad national patterns of United States history and from which an understanding and appreciation of those patterns may be gained; or (2) That are associated importantly with the lives of persons nationally significant in the history of the United States; or (3) That represent some great idea or ideal of the American people; or (4) That embody the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen exceptionally valuable for the study of a period, style or method of construction, or that represent a significant, distinctive and exceptional entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or (5) That are composed of integral parts of the environment not sufficiently significant by reason of historical association or artistic merit to warrant individual recognition but collectively compose an entity of exceptional historical or artistic significance, or outstandingly commemorate or illustrate a way of life or culture; or (6) That have yielded or may be likely to yield information of major scientific importance by revealing new cultures, or by shedding light upon periods of occupation over large areas of the United States. Such sites are those which have yielded, or which may reasonably be expected to yield, data affecting theories, concepts and ideas to a major degree.”

and the Rose Bowl; locations on the Underground Railroad network; notable architectural properties, important archeological sites; and lesser known but nationally significant properties. National Historic Landmarks (NHLs) are also listed on the National Register of Historic Places. NHL designation does not change a property's ownership or ensure that the property is preserved or protected. It does recognize the property's national significance, and, when federal undertakings or management affect the property, special provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Environmental Policy Act apply.

Only a small proportion of National Register properties are National Historic Landmarks. What sets the NHLs apart is their significance on a national level and their recognition by the Secretary of the Interior specifically for that significance. Potential NHLs are usually identified through comparative historical studies produced by the National Park Service on specific themes of American history. Proposed NHLs are then reviewed by the National Park Service and its Advisory Board and recommended to the Secretary of the Interior.

Under the terms of the National Historic Preservation Act, the effects of federal undertakings on any historic property eligible for the National Register must be considered in consultation with interested parties. Because of the national value of NHLs, the act requires federal agencies to exercise a higher standard of care when federal undertakings affect an NHL property. To the maximum extent possible, the agency is responsible to minimize harm to the landmark and to consider feasible alternatives which would avoid adverse effects to the NHL.

Ladd Field NHL

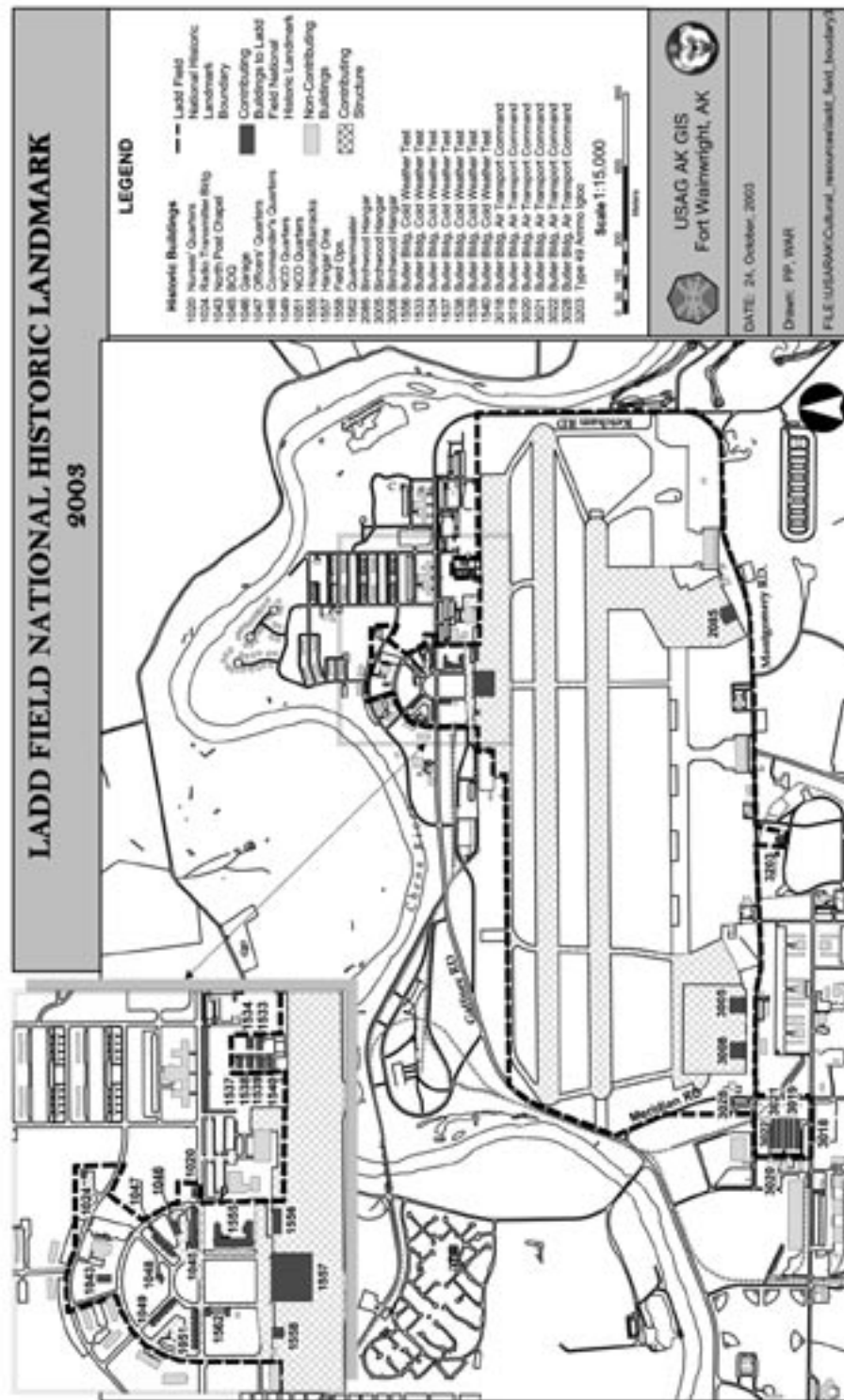
Following a National Park Service review of World War II sites in Alaska, portions of the original Ladd Field were designated a National Historic Landmark in 1985. The original National Register nomination cited Ladd's contribution to cold weather testing, its role as an air depot, and its use as the transfer point for ALSIB Lend-Lease aircraft as elements of its national significance during the war. At that time 40-50 of the World War II buildings remained, though not all of them were included within the landmark boundary. At this writing, 30 WWII-era buildings fall within the boundary of Ladd Field NHL (see Map 5).

The Ladd Field NHL is a multiple property district encompassing the core permanent buildings around the North Post, the airfield, the Birchwood hangars, and Butler warehouses. It also includes structures such as utilidor, roads and runways. Appendix A provides further information on the contributing buildings and their historic uses. The Ladd Field NHL exists on an active military installation and most of its remaining facilities are currently in use by the Army, subject to the full range of Army regulations and mission priorities. Seven of the North Post warehouse buildings have also been out-granted to the Bureau of Land Management in long-term leases.

Ladd Field NHL and the Ladd AFB Cold War District

Ladd Field continued to be a significant site after it became an Air Force Base in 1947. Another historic district from this later period overlays the footprint of the World War II NHL and extends outward to include mission-related buildings constructed by the Air Force in later years. Although the footprint of this district overlaps the NHL, it is a separate entity. The Ladd AFB Historic District recognizes the significance of Cold War events at the base between 1947 and 1960. This district is eligible for, but not listed in, the National Register of Historic Places. Unlike the WWII resources, the Cold War district is not a National Historic Landmark. Properties in the Cold War district must be managed as recognized historic properties under NHPA but are not designated with NHL status.





Map 5. Ladd Field National Historic Landmark, 2003.

